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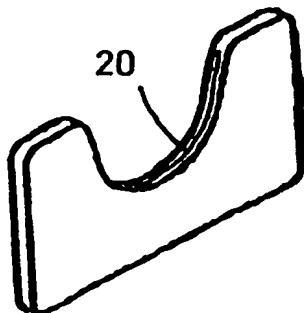
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(54) Title: FINGERPRINT SENSOR



(57) Abstract

This invention relates to an apparatus for measuring structures in a fingerprint or the like, comprising at least one sensor array adapted to be positioned close to, or in contact with, the surface of the fingerprint, the sensor array being adapted to measure chosen characteristics of the surface, e.g. by measuring capacitance or resistivity, at a plurality of positions. At least one sensor array comprises at least one line of sensors, adapted to measure said characteristics at chosen intervals of time, the surface having a relative movement in relation to the sensor array with a direction essentially perpendicular to the at least one line of sensors, and at least one of the outer ends of at least one sensor array protrudes towards the surface to be measured, providing an essentially U-shaped cross section in a plane perpendicular to the direction of said movement.

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FINGERPRINT SENSOR

The invention relates to a method and an apparatus for the measuring of structures in a fingerprint or the like, comprising the measuring of chosen characteristics of the surface of the fingerprint, e.g. capacitance or resistivity, using a sensor array comprising a plurality of sensors, positioned in contact with, or close to, the surface.

Identification by the use of fingerprints has lately come to the fore as a result of the increasing needs for security relating to, for example, credit cards or computer systems as well as the greatly increased availability of pattern recognition algorithms. Some systems for recognition of fingerprints have already been made available on the market. The techniques used to register the fingerprint varies.

Some of the previously known solutions are based upon optical technology using light with one or more wavelengths. These are sensitive to dirt and contamination, both in the fingerprint and on the sensor surface, and thus cleaning is necessary for both.

Another alternative is pressure measurement, such as is described in US 5.559.504, US 5.503.029 and US 4.394.773. This, however, has the disadvantage that the sensor surface becomes sensitive to mechanical wear and damage, as the sensor has to have an at least partially compliant surface.

Temperature sensors have also been suggested, for example in US patent 4,429,413 and international patent application PCT/NO96/00082.

Fingerprint sensors may be exposed to long term use under varying and sometimes demanding conditions. The sensor therefore needs to have a robust surface and to be as insensitive to pollution in the fingerprint and on the sensor as possible. It must be capable of reading most fingerprints without being disturbed by latent prints from earlier use, and also be capable of imaging so-called "dry fingers" that represent a problem for optical sensors. In some cases, e.g. in credit cards or computer keyboards, it would also be advantageous if the sensor could be made compact.

In the view of costs there is also a demand for simp-

licity and minimizing of the number of parts.

It is an object of the present invention to provide a sensor being easy to produce, making them cheap in production, and also relatively small.

5 In addition to the solutions mentioned above the measuring of capacitance has been tried as a method to measure finger prints. Examples are shown in US 4.353.056 and US 5.325.442. While the ridges of the fingerprint touches the sensor surface the valleys have a small distance
10 to the sensor surface, resulting in a difference in capacitance and/or conduction measured at the different sensors. Humidity may affect the measurements, but if it is evenly distributed throughout the fingerprint an analysis of the contrast between the measurements can provide a picture
15 of it.

All the solutions mentioned above are based upon two-dimensional sensor arrays with dimensions comparable to the size of the fingerprint. These are expensive and difficult to produce, since they comprise a large number of sensors
20 simultaneously measuring the surface.

Also, the known sensors disclose only flat sensor surfaces. As finger prints are curved surfaces the sensors are only capable of measuring a small part of the fingerprint, and are thus sensitive to the angle with which the
25 fingerprint is held against the surface.

The present invention provides a method and an apparatus for the measuring of structures in a fingerprint or the like, for example using one of the techniques described above, characterized as stated in the disclosed
30 claims 1 and 6.

As the surface of the sensor array is small, and contains few sensors compared to the known solutions, it is inexpensive and relatively simple to make. As the fingerprint to be measured is moved past the sensor array it is
35 selfcleaning and there is no latent fingerprint remaining from the previous user, giving another advantage in relation to the known finger print sensors.

The curved or essentially U-shaped line of sensors may be made in one piece or by combining two or three linear
40 sensor arrays. Examples of such linear arrays are described

in EP 735.502.

Since the details in the fingerprints are small, it is also difficult to make the sensors of the detector small enough. In a preferred embodiment the apparatus and method according to the invention comprises two or more parallel lines of measuring points, each line of measuring points being shifted in the longitudinal direction with a distance less than the distance between the measuring points, the sensor array comprising two or more parallel lines of equally spaced sensors, preferably shifted in the longitudinal direction of the sensor array. This provides a possibility to measure structures in the fingerprint smaller than the spacing of the sensors. This is not possible with any of the previously known detector systems.

Thus, it is to be understood that the term "essentially one-dimensional array" here refers to an array having a length being much larger than its width, and may comprise more than one line of sensors.

The invention will be described below with reference to the enclosed drawings, which illustrate one possible embodiment of the invention.

Figures 1a and 1b shows a schematic view of two versions of the sensor lines.

Figure 2 shows a perspective view of a first embodiment of the invention.

Figure 3 shows a perspective view of a second embodiment of the invention.

Figure 4 shows a perspective view of a third embodiment of the invention.

Figure 5 shows a perspective view of a fourth embodiment of the invention.

In figure 1a a single, linear array of sensors 1 is shown. The sensors may be of different kinds, such as pressure sensors or temperature sensors, but preferably they are electrical conductors providing a possibility to measure conduction, impedance or capacitance of the different parts of the fingerprint. The surface to be measured is moved in a perpendicular direction relative to the line of sensors.

In the preferred embodiment the sensors 1 are electrical conductors separated by an insulating material 3

such as epoxy. In the shown embodiment an electrically conducting material 2 surrounds the sensors which may be used to provide a reference potential. If capacitance is to be measured the conductors are covered by an insulating layer. Thus the conduction, impedance or capacitance, through the fingerprint, between the each of the sensors 1 and the surrounding reference level may be measured.

To measure the structures in a fingerprint the array will typically be 10-15 mm long with a resolution of 50 μm . This is difficult or expensive to obtain using a single line of sensors. Figure 1b shows a preferred embodiment of the invention in which the sensor array comprises two lines of sensors 1 being slightly shifted in relation to each other. When moving a surface across the sensor array the measurements of each of the sensors in the second line will fall between the measured point of the first line, providing the required resolution with a larger distance between the sensors. Three or more lines are possible to improve the resolution even more, but more than five would be impractical because of the distance between the lines and the resulting time lapse between the measurements of the first and the last line. Also, an apparatus using many lines would be sensitive to the direction in which the finger is moved.

When using a sensor array comprising two or more sensor lines, as shown in figure 1b, the measurements of the different lines must be combined to provide a signal corresponding to one single line of sensors. To do this the signals from the sensors must be adjusted for the time delay between the signals from the sensors in different lines. To do this the movement of the finger in relation to the sensor array must be known, either by moving the finger or sensor array with a chosen speed, or by measuring the movement of the finger.

In stead of using two or more continuous lines of sensor elements the sensor elements may be positioned in groups measuring features in chosen areas of the fingerprint, e.g. depending on the required security of the system or the available data.

Also, the velocity of the fingerprint in relation to

the sensor may be measured by single, independent sensor elements positioned in the direction of the movement of the fingerprint. The velocity may be found by correlating similar features measured at different times at different sensor elements.

A detailed description of the sensor lines may be found in Norwegian Patent application No. 97.2759. The solution therein using a number of conductors being connected to a microchip provides a preferred embodiment of the sensor arrays in the invention. The conductors stretches from the microchip to the sensors surface, so that their ends constitutes the sensor elements.

Figure 2 shows the most simple embodiment of the invention, in which the sensor array 20 has a U-shaped surface, the curvature of which is adapted to the dimensions of the finger to be measured. This solution provides measurements of a larger area of the finger print surface than known devices, linear or flat, but it has the disadvantage that the curvature is fixed, while the dimensions of fingers vary from person to person. Also, the sensor should be able to measure the prints of any finger of a person, to provide redundancy, e.g. in case of accidents.

One way to overcome this problem may be to attach the sensor array to a flexible material, taking shape after the finger.

In figure 3 another fixed solution is shown, comprising a first, slightly more V-shaped sensor array 30, and also comprising a second, linear sensor array 31 being positioned a chosen distance from the first array 30. In this case the U-shaped sensor array will image the sides of the finger, while the flat sensor will image the base of the finger. The two sensor arrays will of course measure partially the same part of a finger print. Correlating these sets of data may be used to find the velocity of the finger over the sensor arrays, as the distance between them is known.

A more flexible solution is shown in figure 4, comprising two sensor arrays 40,41, together defining a U-shape. The parts 40,41 are flexibly connected to each other allowing for a relative movement between them. The connection between the parts may be spring loaded, so that

they follow the shape of the finger, or may be locked in a position chosen according to the size of the users finger. The relative position between the parts 40,41 may be monitored to ease the data processing when combining the
5 signal from the sensor arrays.

The embodiment shown in figure 4 may also comprise a third sensor array 42. As in the embodiment shown in figure 3 the distance between the sensor arrays and correlating of the signals to find the time laps between the passing of the
10 same features, may be used to find the velocity of the finger drawn through the fingerprint sensor.

A similar embodiment is shown in figure 5, where the parts 50,51,52 are rotated in relation to each other, around an axis 53. Again, the relative angle between the sensor
15 parts may be measured to aid the combining of the measured data to obtain a representation of the fingerprint. In an alternative embodiment the intermediate part 51 may be omitted.

In all of the shown embodiments the sensor arrays may
20 comprise a single line of sensor elements, as shown in figure 1a, or two or more, preferably shifted, lines of sensor elements, as indicated in figure 1b.

This invention provides a sensor apparatus being simple to produce using standard techniques, and thus cheap. It is
25 also compact and rugged. If the used measuring technique is based on conductivity the sensor is durable, as the sensors, which in this case is the same as the conductors, will not change their characteristics as they and the surrounding epoxy are worn down. If capacitance is to be measured the
30 conductors are covered by an insulating, durable layer.

The preferred layout of the sensor also allows the resolution to be better than the distance between the sensors, reducing cross-talk between the sensors.

In order to control the movement of the fingers the
35 sensor may comprise grooves with a direction essentially perpendicular to the at least one line of sensors, corresponding to the direction of said movement between the sensor array and the finger print. The grooves will thus guide the finger and avoid movements in a direction other
40 than the required direction.

The method and apparatus according to the invention may of course be utilized in many different ways, and different characteristics may be measured in order to provide a representation of the measured surface, in addition to
5 capacitance and/or conductivity. Optical detectors may be used, and preferably transmitters, so that the reflected image of the fingerprint may be analysed regarding for example contrast and/or colour.

The sensors may, as mentioned above simply be the ends
10 of conductors connected to means for measuring capacitance and/or conductivity, or may be sensors made from semi-conducting materials. A preferred semiconducting material when cost is essential would be silicon.

Another possible embodiment within the scope of this
15 invention comprises sensor lines of not equally spaced sensors positioned to measure chosen parts of the fingerprint.

C l a i m s

1. Apparatus for measuring structures in a fingerprint or the like, comprising at least one sensor array adapted to be positioned close to, or in contact with, the surface of the fingerprint, the sensor array being adapted to measure chosen characteristics of the surface, e.g. by measuring capacitance or resistivity, at a plurality of positions, c h a r a c t e r i z e d in that the at least one sensor array comprises at least one line of sensors, adapted to measure said characteristics at chosen intervals of time, the surface having a relative movement in relation to the sensor array with a direction essentially perpendicular to the at least one line of sensors, and

that at least one of the outer ends of at least one sensor array protrudes towards the surface to be measured, providing an essentially U-shaped cross section in a plane perpendicular to the direction of said movement.

2. Apparatus according to claim 1, c h a r a c t e r i z e d in that it comprises a furrow with an essentially U-shaped cross-section adapted to receive the finger, and that the sensor array or arrays are provided at the surface of the furrow.

3. Apparatus according to claim 1 or 2, c h a r a c t e r i z e d in that it comprises grooves with a direction essentially perpendicular to the at least one line of sensors, corresponding to the direction of said movement between the sensor array and the finger print, for guidance of the finger pulling direction.

4. Apparatus according to one of the preceding claims c h a r a c t e r i z e d in that the apparatus comprises means for combining the measurements at the different time intervals to obtain a segmented, two-dimensional representation of the characteristics of the surface.

5. Apparatus according to one of the preceding claims, characterized in that the essentially one-dimensional sensor array comprises two or more parallel lines of essentially equally spaced sensors, preferably shifted in the longitudinal direction of the sensor array with a distance not equal to the distance between the sensors.

6. Apparatus according to one of the preceding claims, characterized in the apparatus comprising measuring means for measuring of the movement of the surface in relation to the sensor array.

7. Apparatus according to claim 6, characterized in that the device comprises means for correlating the signals from the different lines of sensors to find the time lapse or spacial shift between the similar structures at the different sensor lines.

8. Apparatus according to one of the preceding claims characterized in that the sensors are capacitive sensors adapted to measure variations in the capacitance along the sensor array.

9. Apparatus according to one of the preceding claims characterized in that the sensors comprise electrodes being capable of measuring variations in the electric resistance along the sensor array.

10. Apparatus according to any one of claims 1-6, characterized in that the sensors comprise optical detectors, and preferably optical transmitters.

11. Apparatus according to one of the preceding claims characterized in that the sensor array is made from a semiconducting material, preferably silicon.

12. Apparatus according to one of the preceding claims characterized in that it comprises two or more sensor arrays being capable of moving in relation to each other.

13. Apparatus according to one of the preceding claims
c h a r a c t e r i z e d in that it is mounted in a
flexible material.

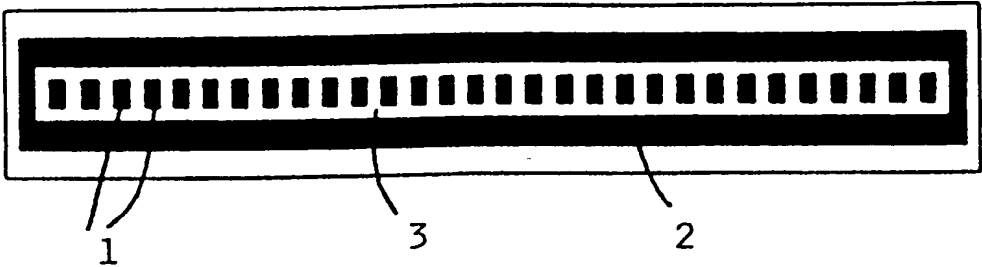


FIG. 1A

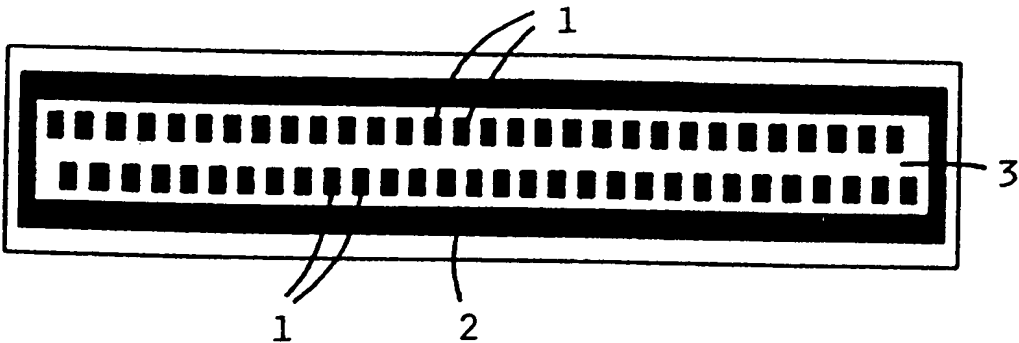


FIG. 1B

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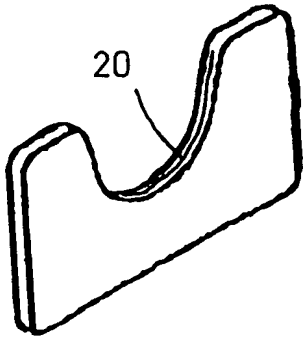


FIG. 2

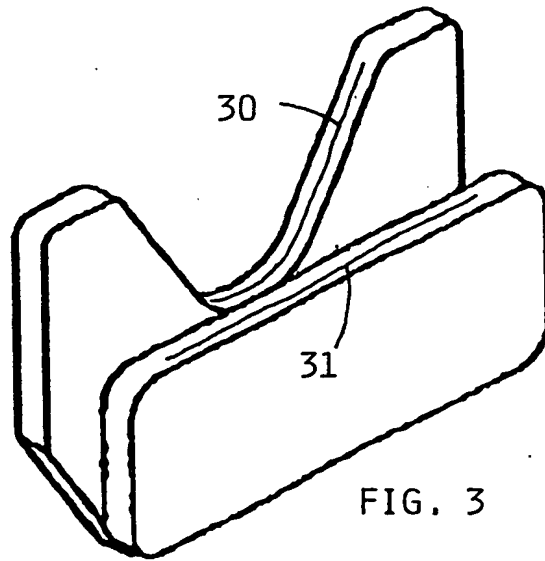


FIG. 3

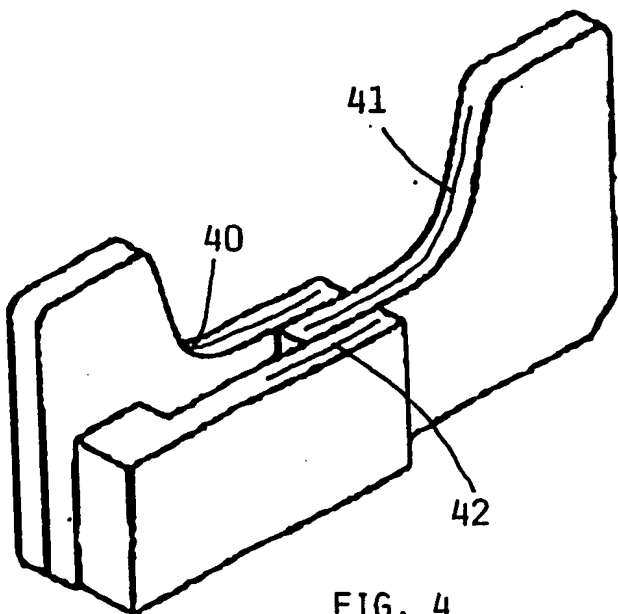


FIG. 4

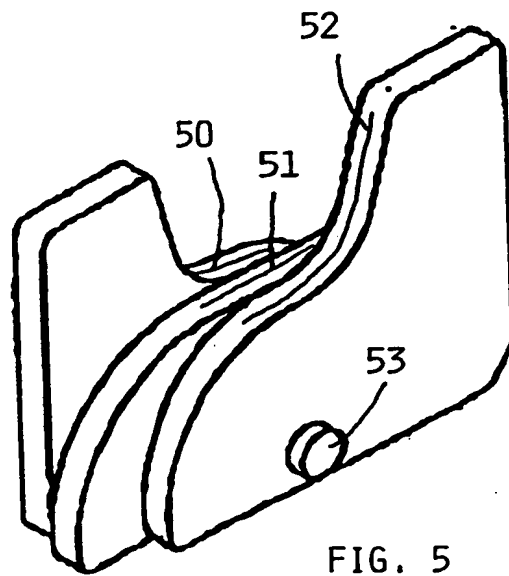


FIG. 5

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/NO 99/00038

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC6: A61B 5/117, G06K 9/00

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

IPC6: A61B, G01B, G06K

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

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C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

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| Y | WO 8503362 A1 (INDENTIX INCORPORATED), 1 August 1985 (01.08.85), page 2, line 6 - line 9, figure 1 -- | 1-13 |

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

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C (Continuation). DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT
Information on patent family members

01/06/99

International application No.
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